DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 482 JC 000 518

AUTHOR Cooney, Frank
TITLE A Review of the Results and Methodology in the 1999 Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey at Salt Lake Community College.
INSTITUTION Salt Lake Community Coll., UT.
PUB DATE 2000-05-00
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Educational Research; Outcomes of Education; *School Effectiveness; *Student Reaction; Student Surveys; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Salt Lake Community College UT

ABSTRACT

This report analyzes the 1999 Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) survey results of Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) (Utah) conducted by the Noel-Levitz company. In 1999, a stratified random sample was utilized that produced a more representative profile of the student demographics compared to previous years (e.g., the percentage of full-time to part-time students in the survey closely reflects the profile for the entire student body). SLCC was rated highest on: responsiveness to diverse populations, registration effectiveness, and academic services. SLCC was rated lowest on: admissions and financial aid, academic advising, and campus support services. Discussions are provided on the following topics: the validation of scale results, program areas with the lowest SSI ratings, examination of the "neutral" response, further analysis of the lowest SSI ratings, and implications and recommendations for further research. The effectiveness of the registration procedures and satisfaction with Academic Services is independently supported by high ratings in the new student and graduating student surveys which are conducted every year. No data were available to independently validate the high rating on responsiveness to diverse populations. The difference in the scores may well be due to the difference in the questionnaire wording. (VWC)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 443 482

A Review of the Results and Methodology in the 1999 Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Survey at SLCC

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Office of Planning and Research
Prepared by
Frank Cooney Ph.D.
Survey and Research Coordinator
May 2000

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

The Noel-Levitz company provides a statistical report of the results of the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) that concentrates on the mean averages of the student responses evaluating SLCC programs and services. This year the company was asked to send a copy of the electronic file of the data base in order to analyze the survey results in greater depth. This permitted the analysis that follow.

The Student Sample

One of the goals of the Noel-Levitz survey at Salt Lake Community College is to have results that are representative of the entire student body. Representativeness depends upon having a very good random sample. In 1999, a stratified random sample was utilized that produced a more representative profile of the student demographics compared to previous years (e.g., the percentage of full-time to part-time students in the survey closely reflects the profile for the entire student body).

Overview of the Survey Results

The survey questionnaire contains roughly 100 questions which are grouped into 12 subject scales with an average evaluation rating for each scale. The maximum range for the scale scores would be 1.00 for "very dissatisfied" to 7.00 for "very satisfied".

The range of scores for the 12 scales at SLCC in 1999 was a low of 4.64 to a high of 5.23

SLCC was rated highest on:	
Responsiveness to Diverse Populations	5.23
Registration Effectiveness	5.12
Academic Services	5.07
SLCC was rated lowest on:	
Admissions and Financial Aid	4.64
Academic Advising	4.67
Campus Support Services	4.69

Validation of the Scale Results

The effectiveness of the registration procedures and satisfaction with Academic Services is independently supported by high ratings in the new student and graduating student surveys which are conducted every year. No data was available to independently validate the high rating on responsiveness to diverse populations.

The fourth ranked program in the survey is Instructional Effectiveness with a 5.05 average rating. SLCC conducts comprehensive student class evaluations every year. For the past five years the results have consistently shown an average class rating of very good (4.00 on a 5.00 scale). These SLCC student class evaluations provide the most conclusive data available because they are the most representative results for the entire student body. While "Instructional Effectiveness" in the SSI is one of the highest rated programs, it is interesting to note that the average score of 5.07 on a 7-point scale is comparatively lower than the average for all classes of 4.00 on a 5.00 scale. The Noel-Levitz scale score would have to be 5.60 to correspond to the official SLCC rating system.

The difference in the scores may well be due to the difference in the questionnaire wording. The SLCC class evaluation system is straightforward and asks for qualitative ratings (e.g., good, very good, etc.) to a general subject (e.g., quality of class, effectiveness of the teacher, etc.). The highest rating for any of the questions in the Noel Levitz Instructional Effectiveness scale is: "The quality of instruction I receive in most of my classes is excellent." The student is then allowed to respond in terms of a range of choices from "very dissatisfied" to "very satisfied." The students are responding to a specific concept which contains the word "excellent." The percentage "satisfied" or "very satisfied" could well have been higher if the students were responding to the generic subject "the quality of instruction." These results illustrate why questionnaire wording is a critical subject in survey research.

Program Areas with the Lowest SSI Ratings

The SLCC program areas ranked lowest on the Student satisfaction inventory were:
"Admissions and Financial Aid" 4.64, "Academic Advising" 4.67, "Campus Support" 4.69. In the Noel Levitz scoring system, a score of 4.60 is just above the midpoint between 4.00 "neutral" and 5.00 "somewhat satisfied."

Further examination of the "Campus Support" scale found a problem in the data that suggests no conclusions should be drawn from these results alone. This scale focuses primarily on programs that are used by very small percentages of the student body (e.g. one and three percent) The scores on four of the questions in this scale (e.g., Veteran's Services) were significantly lowered because of the number of respondents who used the "neutral" response when they had the option of the "not used" response. The "neutral" responses, with a score of 4.00, become a part of the average score calculation.

To what extent is this methodological situation a potential factor in other program areas? It appears to apply to a number of program areas.

Examination of the "Neutral" Response

The Noel-Levitz questionnaire contains eight response options. The "not available/not used" response is not part of the evaluation score calculation. There are three response levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction and a "neutral" response option. All seven are used in the scoring calculation. With a "not used" response option available, the "neutral" response is available for persons who did use and are familiar with the subject in question, but who do not want to take either a "satisfied" or dissatisfied" position. Perhaps their feelings are too uncertain or mixed, or they simply don't have an opinion. The "neutral" response receives a score of 4 on the 7-point scale. The "somewhat satisfied" response receives a score of 5. The average rating scores for all SLCC program areas and the individual questions that make up a program area tend to range between the high 5's and low 4's. A large percentage of "neutral" responses on individual questions will bring a program area score down. The question is, in such cases, are the lower scores a valid reflection of dissatisfaction and program problems?

The following table provides examples of what could be argued are normal amounts of uncertainty about a question as reflected in the percentage of "neutral" responses.

SSI Questions with the Lowest Percentage of "Neutral" Responses

Question #	Question	Percentage of "Neutral" (#4) Responses
8	Classes are scheduled at convenient times	8.7
69	A good variety of courses are provided	9.9
97	Overall satisfaction with SLCC experience	11
39	Amount of student parking space on campus is adequate	13.7

The potential problem can be seen in the next table. Roughly one percent of the student body has contact with the child care center and perhaps four percent with the personnel in the Veteran Services Office. In the question dealing with the latter program, 38.3 % responded they did not use the office. Seventy percent of those included in the rating score for this program marked the "neutral" response (43.4% of 61.7%). The lower evaluation score on this question does not validly establish the conclusion that there is a problem in this program area.

This observation also applies to the lower scores received by the child care and displaced homemaker programs. It may also apply to the security staff evaluations.

SSI Questions with the Highest Percentage of "Neutral" Responses

Question #	Question	Percentage of "Neutral" (#4) Responses
4	Security staff helpful	41.5
10	Child care facilities are available on campus	45.8
11	Security staff respond quickly in emergencies	44.5
17	Personnel in Veterans' Services helpful	43.4
19	Effective support services for displaced homemakers	41.7

Large percentages of "neutral" responses may also affect the programs related to the following questions.

SSI Questions with the Second Highest Percentage of "Neutral" Responses

Question #	Question	Percentage of "Neutral" (#4) Responses
9	Internships are provided in my program	35.0
33	Academic counselors accurately portray the campus in recruiting	34.9
30	Career services provide the help students need	33.5
44	I generally know what's happening on campus	33.4
49	Admissions counselors respond to student's unique needs and requests	32.4
13	Financial aid awards are announced in time to be helpful in college planning	32.4
20	Financial aid counselors are helpful	30.4
55	Academic support services adequately meet student needs	30.3

Further Analysis of the Lowest SSI Ratings

The lower rating for the admissions and financial aid programs deserves closer analysis. To do this, the "did not use" and the "neutral" responses were taken out of the calculations for the question "Financial aid counselors are helpful. That eliminated 55 percent of the total respondents. The resulting calculation found that 71 were satisfied on this subject and 29 percent were dissatisfied. The first point of analysis is that the majority of respondents were positive in their evaluation. But the 29 percent negative is comparably higher than most other questions in the SSI survey. It is not possible to know why there were that many negative responses based solely on the questions in the SSI. Was it student expectations, a problem with the staff persons involved, the system process itself, or some other reason? Only further research and investigation could provide the answer.

Academic advising at SLCC is a large multifaceted effort. It is conducted by staff and faculty in multiple locations and programs. The SSI does not provide any information on the student's frame of reference. Do the ratings apply to all parts, or only certain segments of the advising program? Furthermore, only additional research would clarify the extent that any problems are attributable to the staff, the system or some other factor. But the questions that comprise this scale do provide some valuable data and insights.

The two related questions with the lowest scores are: "My academic advisor helps me set goals to work toward" and, "My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual." Anecdotal reports suggest that most students meet with an academic advisor only to schedule classes for the upcoming semester. Long range career and academic planning is a different need and subject. The lower score on "setting goals" draws attention to the need for just such long range planning with some students'

What might be the extent of the problem? Excluding the "did not use" and "neutral" responses the percentage of positive and negative evaluations were calculated.

Results from Three Questions in the Academic Advising Scale		
	Positive	Negative
My academic advisor helps me set goals to work toward.	64 %	36%
My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual	67%	33%
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about my program requirements	75%	25%

The possibility that between one-quarter and one-third of the students who use the academic advising program are dissatisfied strongly invokes the need for further investigation and research into the program area.

Finally, it is interesting to note that out of the whole questionnaire, the two single questions that receive the lowest rating are not a part of the lowest ranked program areas examined above. Those are a score of 4.15 on the adequacy of parking and a score of 4.14 on the item " Students are notified early in the term if they are doing poorly in a class." Both of these subjects have received

similarly lower ratings on other surveys. The one on feedback about academic progress during the semester is a subject that should be examined further by the faculty.

A Comparison of SLCC and Weber State University Student Ratings

Many of the same questions were asked at SLCC and Weber State University in last year's Noel Levitz Surveys. A selective comparison is presented below.

SLCC's overall evaluations are higher than those for Weber State. But the advising and financial aid programs again have lower comparable ratings. Additional information is necessary before it can be known exactly what the problem is, where it is a problem and why it is a problem.

Comparable Student Evaluations on the General Campus Environment		
Question	SLCC	Weber State
It is an enjoyable experience to be a student on this campus	5.26	5.04
Students are made to feel welcome on this campus	5.24	4.95
This institution has a good reputation within the community	5.37	5.31

Comparable Student Evaluations on the Academic Advising Programs		
Question	SLCC	Weber State
My academic advisor is approachable	4.92	5.02
My academic advisor helps me to set goals to work toward	4.34	4.55
My academic advisor is concerned about my success as an individual	4.44	4.85
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	4.81	5.19

Comparable Student Evaluations on the Financial Aid Programs		
Question	SLCC	Weber State
Financial aid counselors are helpful	4.48	4.63
Financial aid awards are announced to students in time to be helpful in college planning.	4.27	4.67
Adequate financial aid is available for most students	4.66	4.38
My academic advisor is knowledgeable about requirements in my major.	4.81	5.19

Recommendations

Continue to use the Noel-Levitz survey with one important modification in the survey procedure. Instructions to the students participating in the survey should explain the purpose of the "neutral" versus the "did not use" response options. Drawing this to their attention should lower the number of "neutral" responses. All other things being equal, the result should be a raising of the average rating scores.

It is also important to properly impress on the students the importance of the survey and their participation. It is better that they do not respond to any one question than to arbitrarily mark one response (e.g. #4) to a long series of questions.

Continue to order the survey data disk from Noel-Levitz so that the percentage of positive and negative responses can be calculated for individual questions.

Recognize that the Noel-Levitz survey accomplishes its purpose by providing a broad overview of student satisfaction. But broad overviews, by nature, are relatively superficial. When results suggest that a problem may exist, the appropriate next step is to investigate the situation in greater depth. A variety of methodologies could be used to gather further information. This includes: a follow-up survey with questions that focus on specific aspects of the situation (e.g. where is the problem, what is the specific problem and why is it a problem). A questionnaire survey, or focus group discussion, with specific students or staff and faculty are valuable research options. Good research

typically raises further questions. Research, evaluation and program improvement need to be understood as an on-going evolutionary process.